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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS ENDGAME: ABDULLAH CLOSE TO CONCEDED

Classified By: PolCouns Annie Pforzheimer reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Abdullah appears in the final stage of a decision to withdraw from the election, with an announcement most likely to take place on Sunday November 1. Meanwhile, Karzai's camp entered more productive negotiations with Abdullah (with a major bid for positions from Abdullah supporter Rabbani.) The two candidates appear, late on October 31, to be reaching a possible understanding permitting a less divisive Abdullah withdrawal. However, both candidates' supporters are urging intransigence: Karzai's backers want no concessions, and full speed to a second round, while Abdullah's supporters urge a boycott. End Summary.

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Karzai Calms Down  
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¶2. (S) Ambassador Eikenberry met with President Karzai one-on-one for breakfast October 31, later joined by National Security Advisor Rassoul and Palace Chief of Staff Daudzai. Karzai had a more rational, alert, and strategic mindset than the day before, when he had held some difficult meetings with SRSG Kai Eide. Karzai said he had misunderstood from those meetings that the International Community (IC) was not preparing rigorously for the second round, and that he was under pressure to accept a visit by Ban Ki-Moon. Karzai thought the timing was wrong for a high-level UN visit as it would cast a further stigma on his presidency, as it reminds Afghans of the failed UN process in the 90s. (Note: The Ban visit would have been only potentially political, but is aimed at visiting the UN staff after the October 28 attack. End note.) He said a visit from the Secretary of State would be more positive than the UNSYG.

¶3. (S) Ambassador Eikenberry told Karzai there were four options in the elections process: 1) a second round, 2) an Abdullah boycott, 3) Abdullah's concession with no plans to work with Karzai, and 4) an Abdullah concession with some sort of agreement with Karzai. Karzai expressed concern that if there was no second round, would his government be considered legitimate? Ambassador Eikenberry said that all of these four options would produce a legitimate, constitutional result, but that in the long term, legitimacy is determined by political factors that Karzai understands very well. He thanked the Ambassador for his constructive mediation role, underscoring that the Ambassador had been asked by both parties to facilitate a dialogue. Separately, Daudzai said a second round was only about 50 percent likely, noting that "no one was campaigning hard." On Abdullah, Karzai said if he concedes the elections, Karzai would "find a place for him, do not worry."

¶4. (S) Separately, President Karzai's special advisor, Shaida Abdali, told Polcouns that Karzai was deeply concerned that we wanted Abdullah to head a Constitutional Commission, because Abdullah openly wants to change Afghanistan to a parliamentary system. Polcouns noted that such a commission

would not have binding powers (only a Loya Jirga could actually change the Constitution) and that since one-third of the electorate voted for Abdullah there was clear interest in at least debating the merits of a parliamentary system and other constitutional changes. Karzai's brother Mahmood also contacted D/Ambassador with a similar concern about putative U.S. support for changing to a parliamentary system and/or election of governors. Ricciardone made clear that the U.S. government takes no position on these issues and that in fact we see the numerous arguments against such proposals, but that Abdullah's campaign had made these a matter of open, legitimate and healthy public debate.

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Karzai Supporters Want a Second Round  
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¶5. (S) All of the pro-Karzai politicians we have spoken to in the last week are pushing for a second round, to include representatives from Junbesh, Hezb-e-Islami, and the Republican parties. Junbesh MP Shakar Kargar (Faryab, Uzbek) told us October 31 that Abdullah should accept a second round, since if he quits now, he will be "committing political suicide" and will lose his followers. He said Lower House Speaker Qanooni, Karzai's First Vice President Candidate Marshal Fahim, Professor (and former President) Rabbani, and Ahmed Zia Massoud are all jockeying to own the Tajik vote, and are hoping Abdullah makes mistakes now. They put Abdullah out front this election as a "sacrificial lamb" as they make plans for a run in five years.

¶6. (S) Kargar said Dostum is returning to Afghanistan

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November 1 and has asked Karzai to send a plane again. He will come, campaign if there is an election, but mostly try to push Karzai to give his supporters jobs. This will likely lead to conflicts within the Junbesh party. Kargar said the IC could campaign against the appointment of warlord cronies since it is the same result as if the warlords themselves were the Ministers.

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The View from Abdullah's Side  
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¶7. (S) Abdullah Advisor Farid Zikria told us October 31 he was not optimistic that Karzai and Abdullah would make a deal. He described Abdullah's deep distrust of Karzai, reminding us of how Karzai had fired Abdullah without warning as Foreign Minister while Abdullah was in Washington at a meeting with former Secretary of State Rice. Zikria said Abdullah is an independent and logical thinker and will make a "responsible" decision that night on whether to concede or go to a second round. Zikria said Abdullah would most likely withdraw on his own terms, without heeding advice from supporters like Rabbani, and then influence politics through the Parliament and his supporters as an opposition movement. Abdullah has called many supporters to a meeting the morning of November 1 to discuss his decision, and will hold a press conference in the afternoon to announce it. He said after the October 28 two hour meeting with Karzai, where Karzai did not admit to one case of fraud in the elections, Abdullah further understood Karzai's mindset and what it would be like to work with him again.

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Abdullah's Withdrawal From the Election  
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¶8. (S) UNAMA SRSG Eide reported to us that in a noon October 31 meeting, Dr. Abdullah stated that he would withdraw from the second round "in the interests of the country." He said he will concede the election rather than boycott it as a boycott is what the Taliban are doing. Abdullah said that in his withdrawal speech, to be delivered on November 1, he

would call for national solidarity and ask his supporters to remain calm. Abdullah added that Senator John Kerry (D-MA) had called the night before expressing concern about his "messaging" but Abdullah reportedly reassured him he would act responsibly.

¶9. (S) According to Eide, Abdullah said that his personal commitment to change has not diminished and that he will continue with his anti-corruption agenda. He said he wants what he feels is best for Afghanistan, recognizing that he has "three key audiences" that he must speak to: the Afghan people, his followers, and the international community (whom he will thank for its sacrifices.) On the breakdown in talks between his camp and Karzai's, Abdullah said that he had had a pointless meeting with Daudzai the night of October 30 which motivated him to give up talks. Ambassador Eide applauded Dr. Abdullah's decision not to boycott and his intention to call for calm and solidarity, ensuring Abdullah that such an announcement would quickly be followed by public UN praise.

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Abdullah's Withdrawal From His Handlers  
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¶10. (S) However, meeting Eide again only two hours later at Abdullah's urgent request, Abdullah told Eide that Daudzai had come to him with more specifics. Daudzai had been negotiating with Abdullah's erstwhile patron Burhanuddin Rabbani following Abdullah's decision to stop negotiating directly with Karzai's camp. Daudzai reportedly told Abdullah that Karzai was considering offering Abdullah the chairmanship of a "Reform Commission." Abdullah indicated interest in the notion to Eide, depending on the nature of the Commission. However, Abdullah also appeared displeased that the rest of the Daudzai-Rabbani conversation pointed to the formation of a Coalition Government, which is "not what I'm after." He said he wants only to have a say in who is appointed to various positions in the Karzai Administration, not to be specifically responsible for choosing appointees. Eide inferred that Abdullah's opposition to such a split of Ministry appointments stemmed from his concern that "anyone Rabbani or Karzai might propose, I might or might not want." His version, veto power over Karzai's suggested appointees, would be a "government of national participation" rather than a coalition. Abdullah indicated that if he is granted this "say in appointments" he will amend his November 1 concession statement in a positive way. He planned to decide firmly the night of October 31, notify President Karzai in the morning

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of his decision, so Karzai can decide on the Palace response, and then make his withdrawal announcement in the afternoon.

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An Emboldened IEC  
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¶11. (S) Meanwhile, in an October 31 meeting with senior IEC officials to continue preparations for a second round, Embassy officers reviewed a list of 28 recommendations for fraud mitigation through which the IEC can avoid mistakes of the previous round. The IEC was uninterested, however, giving reasons why every suggested improvement except one could not be done or was not necessary. They even rejected removing polling centers from the homes of local officials, a key source of fraud. They described the IEC's plans to push all decisions regarding any investigations or audit after the elections onto the Electoral Complaints Commission. At the end of the meeting their single request was for a replacement for their data programmer at Headquarters (he absconded when sent to the U.S. for elections-related training).

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Ambassador Meets with Key Ministers  
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¶12. (S) Ambassador Eikenberry met mid-afternoon October 31 with Minister of Defense Wardak, Minister of Interior Atmar, and Minister of Finance Zakhilwal, on the margins of a public outreach event. All three acknowledged that Karzai-Abdullah talks were ongoing, believed Abdullah will announce the next day that he will withdraw from the race, and said that they had urged both candidates to make a final decision by November 2, the date on which the Afghan National Security Forces will begin to move into place to provide election security.

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The Possible Terms  
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¶13. (S) Later on October 31, Ambassador Eikenberry met again with President Karzai, Rassoul, Daudzai and Abdali. In his own version of his meeting with Abdullah, Daudzai claimed that Abdullah said he wanted an appointment as the head of a commission on reform of state institutions in return for withdrawing. Karzai said that this seemed reasonable. Abdullah reportedly also wanted a continuation of talks on a common platform. Eikenberry reaffirmed to Karzai that Abdullah is a respectable politician with a future and wants a position for himself along with a dialogue on a common platform. He told Karzai that if Abdullah does withdraw he would expect Karzai to reach out to him. Karzai agreed to do this, and said he might meet with Abdullah late October 31.

¶14. (S) Eikenberry told Karzai that we expect that an Abdullah withdrawal would set into motion a complex sequencing of Afghan actions and foreign responses. For example, if Abdullah announced his withdrawal and Karzai accepted, then there would next have to be a legal finding on whether the IEC could certify the election. In addition, we understand that an appeal to the Supreme Court would be likely. The U.S. and the international community would then need to be respectful of the legal process before acknowledging the apparent outcome or offering congratulations.

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Rabbani's Demands  
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¶15. (S) Karzai told Eikenberry that he had met with Rabbani, who had handed him a list of what he wanted in return for his support. The list included approximately eight key ministries -- including the security ministries -- key posts like Attorney General, ten governorships, and ten ambassadorships.

¶16. (S) Eikenberry said that he had met with Rabbani four days earlier and made the U.S. position clear. A boycott of the election would be a setback for the democratic process in Afghanistan and political suicide for anyone who advocated for one. He also had told Rabbani that the U.S. is against a divided and divisive coalition government. However, if Afghans decide the distribution of posts in their own decision making process to form an inclusive government, then that is part of democracy. Karzai said that he was comfortable with this. Both Eikenberry and Karzai agreed that Rabbani's demands are completely separate from Abdullah's.

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¶17. (S) D/Ambassador Ricciardone met with Rabbani late October 31 to reiterate that the U.S. does not support a coalition government, an "interim government" (as Rabbani said "some" are advocating) or a boycott. Rabbani countered that his people must not be "humiliated" by being excluded from the government and pointed out that it was in effect already a "coalition" since Karzai, at the outset of the campaign, had promised percentages of the government to

various political and ethnic groupings. Rabbani warned that any effort to sideline the Tajiks would lead to an uprising, pointing out that the Soviets and the Talibs were beaten by the North. Rabbani confirmed the terms of his latest offer to Karzai. In exchange for delivering Abdullah's concession (vs. a boycott) and overtly supporting Karzai, who he deeply dislikes, Rabbani would support Abdullah's joining a "government of national participation." Rabbani specified that he had "reduced his original requests" down to for 10 ambassadorships; 10 consulates; 8 ministries; and 10 governorships; also he no longer required the positions of Central Bank Governor, Head of Presidential Administrative Affairs, Head of the Afghan Red Crescent and 10 deputy governorships.

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